Bibliographic References

The Real Mind of Isaac Newton: What They Got Wrong

A compiled record of the historical, biographical, and archival sources consulted in the research and preparation of this episode.

Compiled for documentary and educational reference purposes.

Note on This Document

The sources below are organized to follow the chronological and thematic arc of the episode itself, from the plague-year origins of the Principia through Newton's decades of secret alchemical research, his concealed religious heresy, his feuds with Robert Hooke and Gottfried Leibniz, his 1693 breakdown, and his final three decades as a criminal investigator at the Royal Mint. Where popular legend and documented archival record diverge — as with the destruction of Hooke's portrait — the relevant scholarly sources are marked accordingly.

I. Cambridge, the Plague Years, and the Principia (1661–1687)

Westfall, Richard S. Never at Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

The standard full-length academic biography of Newton, used as the principal cross-check throughout this episode; source for the Woolsthorpe plague years, the apple anecdote as recorded by William Stukeley, and the 1684 visit by Edmond Halley that led to the Principia's publication.

Newton, Isaac. Fitzwilliam Notebook ("List of Sins"), 1662. Transcribed and published online by the Newton Project, University of Oxford.

Primary manuscript source for Newton's adolescent list of confessed transgressions, including the recorded threat against his mother and stepfather, Barnabas Smith.

II. The Secret Alchemist

Newman, William R. Newton the Alchemist: Science, Enigma, and the Quest for Nature's "Secret Fire." Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Principal modern academic study of Newton's alchemical manuscripts; source for the estimate of roughly one million words of alchemical writing, the analysis of Newton's use of the pseudonymous anagram "Jeova Sanctus Unus," and the scholarly argument connecting his alchemical thought to his willingness to propose gravitational action at a distance.

The Chymistry of Isaac Newton Project, Indiana University. Online archive: webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/newton

Digital edition and transcription project for Newton's alchemical manuscripts, used to verify word-count estimates and manuscript provenance.

Dobbs, Betty Jo Teeter. The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy: The Hunting of the Greene Lyon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Foundational scholarly study establishing that Newton's alchemical research was pursued as a serious, sustained program rather than an isolated eccentricity.

III. The Hidden Heretic: Newton's Theology (1675–1727)

Snobelen, Stephen D. "Isaac Newton, Heretic: The Strategies of a Nicodemite." British Journal for the History of Science 32, no. 4 (1999): 381–419.

Principal scholarly source on Newton's private Arianism, his rejection of the Trinity, and his lifelong strategy of public conformity concealing private heterodox belief, including the case of William Whiston's 1710 expulsion from Cambridge for openly declaring the same views.

Westfall, Richard S. Never at Rest. Chapters on the 1675 royal dispensation from King Charles II exempting the Lucasian Professorship from mandatory ordination, obtained with the assistance of Isaac Barrow.

Snobelen, Stephen D. "Statement of Faith? Newton's Manuscript on Daniel and the Prophetic Calculation of 2060." Newton Project, University of Oxford.

Source for Newton's chronological calculation, based on his reading of the Book of Daniel, that the world could not end before the year 2060.

IV. Feuds: Hooke and Leibniz (1670s–1716)

Hall, A. Rupert. Philosophers at War: The Quarrel between Newton and Leibniz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Standard scholarly account of the calculus priority dispute, including the analysis of surviving drafts establishing that Newton anonymously authored substantial portions of the Royal Society's supposedly independent 1712 Commercium Epistolicum report, and his subsequent anonymous review of that same report.

Westfall, Richard S. Never at Rest. Chapters on the Newton–Hooke correspondence concerning the inverse-square law, and critical assessment of the popular but unsubstantiated claim that Newton had Hooke's portrait removed from the Royal Society.

V. The 1693 Breakdown

Spargo, P. E., and C. A. Pounds. "Newton's 'Derangement of the Intellect': New Light on an Old Problem." Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London 34, no. 1 (1979): 11–32.

Scientific analysis of preserved samples of Newton's hair, finding mercury levels above contemporary norms; the primary source for the mercury-exposure hypothesis discussed alongside competing explanations for Newton's 1693 breakdown.

Newton's correspondence with John Locke and Samuel Pepys, September–October 1693, as reproduced in Westfall, Never at Rest.

VI. Warden and Master of the Royal Mint (1696–1727)

Levenson, Thomas. Newton and the Counterfeiter: The Unknown Detective Career of the World's Greatest Scientist. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009.

The principal source for this section; a full historical account of Newton's tenure at the Royal Mint, his investigative methods, and the multi-year pursuit, trial, and 1699 execution of the counterfeiter William Chaloner, including Chaloner's surviving letters pleading for clemency.